

Civics Testimony to the Idaho House Education Committee, 3/14/17

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Taylor and I am the K-12 curriculum supervisor of science, history, and social sciences in the Boise School District. I am here to testify against HCR 14 which mandates adding 20% more questions on the civics test, questions specifically dealing with Idaho history and government.

I oppose this resolution for the following reasons:

- Rep. Bateman, who sponsors this resolution, is very passionate about our state of Idaho, as am I, and I have personally have worked with him the last three years to incorporate Idaho Day activities in Boise School District classrooms. Two weeks ago, on March 3rd, 32 of our schools participated in events to celebrate our state. Events included Pioneer Day Projects, Famous Idahoan presentations, Wagon's Ho, visits to the Capitol, and music programs focusing on the greatness of our state. Students were excited about celebrating Idaho during all these instructional activities. Do you honestly think adding 25 questions to the civics test will "Inspire enthusiasm" for Idaho civics, government and history like what we saw on Idaho Day?
- Idaho's students are already required to study Idaho History (they spend a whole year on it in 4th grade). From the earliest explorations of Idaho, to early mining settlements, to the Oregon Trail's legacy, to relations with Native Americans and the consequences of those encounters, to labor struggles, to women's suffrage, to statehood, and to the role of Idaho's resources, economy, and political personalities in shaping 20th Century America, our secondary students have the opportunity to study and place events that shaped Idaho's History in the broader context of U.S. History (which is already a graduation requirement). Senior American Government students study state and local government to fulfill another current graduation requirement. Despite all this, and the associated classroom assessments, will 25 questions added to the state's Civics Test, covering already paved ground, generate "enthusiasm" about Idaho's "great[ness]" and increase the sophistication of voters? We and many other districts already administer End of Course Exams in both American Government and U.S. History courses – tests that go well beyond recall questions and that require students to demonstrate their understanding of the how's and why's of government and history. We are fully aware that not all districts have our resources, so we provide these examinations at no cost to all districts requesting them.
- Many students transfer into our school district each year (a great number from different countries). Some students transfer into our district their senior year. Are these students to be tested on information they never learned in another state's Fourth Grade class, or in different U.S. History programs? Or, are teachers expected to differentiate instruction to the point of providing a concurrent "catch-up" course of study to ensure that new students are equally informed and enthusiastic about Idaho?
- The House Education Committee heard there would be no financial impact by adding more to the current Civics Test. Last spring, the Boise School District paid teachers to spend two days writing and uploading that test in our SIS system, and have hired one dedicated person to help make sure all students have taken the Civics Test, passed the

test, and have been given ample opportunities to retest, if needed (retesting has especially impacted our ELL population). Adding 20% more questions or rewriting the Civics Test to include a proportion of Idaho history and government questions will indeed have a cost.

- In sum, HCR 14 is well-intentioned but imposes a requirement that is neither necessary nor without cost. Maybe more disturbing to me is the implicit message to our teachers and patrons that our Idaho History program has been ineffective, and that our United States History and American Government teachers have neglected their responsibility to teach state government and the important connections of Idaho's history to our nation's story. Having oversight of these programs, I have seen no evidence of either, whatsoever.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am happy to stand for questions.

Respectfully,

Christopher Taylor

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Boise School District